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9 **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
10 DISTRICT OF NEVADA**

11 LORA BRAND)
12 Plaintiff,) Case No.: 2:20-cv-02219-NJK
13 v.)
14 ANDREW SAUL,) UNOPPOSED MOTION FOR EXTENSION
15 Commissioner of Social Security,) OF TIME (FIRST REQUEST)
16 Defendant.)

17
18 Defendant, Andrew Saul, Commissioner of Social Security (the “Commissioner”), by and
19 through his undersigned attorneys, hereby moves for a 60-day extension of time to file Defendant’s
20 Electronic Certified Administrative Record and Answer to Plaintiff’s Complaint. Defendant’s
21 Electronic Certified Administrative Record and Answer to Plaintiff’s Complaint are due to be filed
22 by February 15, 2021.

23 Defendant makes this request in good faith and for good cause, because the CAR, which
24 must be filed with the Answer and is necessary to adjudicate the case, is not yet available. The
25 public health emergency pandemic caused by COVID-19 has significantly impacted operations in
26 the Social Security Administration’s Office of Appellate Operations (OAO) in Falls Church,

1 Virginia, which is responsible for producing the CAR that must be filed with the Answer, per 42
2 U.S.C. §§ 405(g) and (h). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, to safeguard Personally Identifiable
3 Information (PII), all hearing recordings, which are part of the administrative record, were
4 downloaded onto compact discs and encrypted. OAO securely routed the encrypted discs to a
5 private contractor through a daily pickup and delivery service at the Official Duty Station (ODS) in
6 Falls Church, Virginia. The private contractor would transcribe the hearing recording and send the
7 paper copy of the hearing transcript back to OAO. OAO personnel would then scan the hearing
8 transcript into the electronic record or place the hearing transcript in the paper case file. Thereafter,
9 OAO personnel would assemble the administrative record in a prescribed order. After the advent of
10 COVID-19, the Agency has taken a number of concrete steps to transition its years-old in person
11 CAR preparation process to a fully virtual one.

12 OAO has been actively pursuing mitigation efforts to allow the remote preparation of
13 administrative records to ensure a continuity of operations. For cases in which the private
14 contractors were already in possession of hearing recordings for transcription, with the assistance of
15 the Office of Acquisitions and Grants (OAG), OAO received approval to receive these transcripts
16 from the private contractors via secured email, e.g., using password protection and redacted Social
17 Security Numbers. In April 2020, OAO began receiving such hearing transcripts from private
18 contractors via secured email.

19 For cases in which OAO had not yet submitted recordings to the private contractors before
20 March 16, 2020, OAO has been pursuing all available options to obtain transcriptions for these
21 cases. In May 2020, OAO began encrypting hearing recordings and securely emailing them to the
22 contractors for transcription. Through the month of May, OAO and the contractors worked to
23 resolve technical issues that arose, particularly with large files.

24 As detailed in the attached declarations from Jebby Rasputnis, Executive Director of the
25 OAO, the Commissioner has redesigned its business process to allow for virtual CAR production,
26 including adopting new technology, retraining staff, modifying blanket purchase agreements with
transcription services, adding two more transcription vendors, and transferring and hiring

1 employees to help with the workload. In addition to the changes made by the Commissioner, the
2 agency's transcription vendors are also modifying their business operations to help provide virtual
3 services. Although the agency has improved its CAR production and works to continue its
4 improvement, OAO must still navigate and overcome significant challenges, including a backlog of
5 over 11,000 cases.

6 OAO is trying to prioritize CAR preparation based on objective factors, such as filing date,
7 and is working diligently to address the backlog of CARS. Out of fairness to all social security
8 claimants, Defendant respectfully requests that the Court defer to OAO's prioritization of cases for
9 CAR preparation and maintain consistency in the length of extensions granted in social security
10 cases, absent a showing of exceptional circumstances. Counsel for Defendant further states that the
11 Office of General Counsel (OGC) is monitoring receipt of transcripts on a daily basis and is
12 committed to filing Answers promptly upon receipt and review of the administrative records.

13 Given the volume of pending cases, Defendant requests an extension in which to respond to
14 the Complaint until April 16, 2021. If Defendant is unable to produce the certified administrative
15 record necessary to file an Answer in accordance with this Order, Defendant shall request an
16 additional extension prior to the due date.

17 The undersigned affirms that opposing counsel does not object to the requested extension.

1 WHEREFORE, the Defendant asks the Court to enlarge the time for filing the Electronic
2 Certified Administrative Record and Answer to Plaintiff's Complaint until April 16, 2021.

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4 Dated: February 8, 2021

5 Respectfully submitted

6 NICHOLAS A. TRUTANICH
7 United States Attorney

8 /s/ Marcelo Illarmo
9 MARCELO ILLARMO
10 Special Assistant United States Attorney

11 IT IS SO ORDERED:

12 
13 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

14 DATED: February 8, 2021